

## Evidence-Base: Mutual Support

Mutual Support is commonly referred to as backup behavior in the teamwork literature. Back-up behavior is considered critical to the social and task performance aspects of teams and essentially involves helping other team members to perform their tasks.<sup>3,4</sup> The construct suggests some degree of task interchangeability among members since they must fully understand what each other does and be willing to provide and seek assistance when needed. Porter et al. define back-up as “the discretionary provision of resources and task-related effort to another member of one’s team that is intended to help that team member obtain the goals as defined by his or her role when it is apparent that the team member is failing to reach those goals.” p.392.<sup>4</sup> Back-up behavior differs from feedback in that it is usually more proactive.<sup>3</sup>

A team back-up behavior can be provided by offering or requesting assistance. Back-up often includes filling in for a team member who is unable to perform a task and helping others correct their mistakes. A member may be unable to perform their tasks because the individual is inexperienced, incapable, overburdened, or has made an error.<sup>3</sup> Back-up behavior is also provided when a member is unable to perform all their tasks, or a fellow team member is presently underutilized. Porter et al. note that when such underutilized individuals back-up the individual whose capacity is being surpassed, the team is allowed to dynamically adjust. This level of performance could not have been accomplished had the members been working solely as individuals.<sup>4</sup> Situation monitoring allows team members to effectively assess whether fellow members’ are overloaded. Back-up behavior allows reallocation of work tasks to underutilized team members, resulting in teams being more adaptive.

In summary, mutual support is a core skill that enables teams to function effectively. Supporting teams typically:

- Backup and fill in for each other
- Are self-correcting
- Compensate for each other
- Reallocate functions
- Distribute and assign work thoughtfully
- Regularly provide feedback to each other (both individually and as a team)<sup>5</sup>

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### References

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